CANADIANS AND THE NEW AMERICAN CENTURY

Proposal for research and scripting a 3-hour documentary series

The size and populist character of the anti-war movement which broke out in cities and towns across Canada this winter was so unprecedented that it has inspired a number of us in the documentary film community to try something that has never been done before in this country: to make a film out of the contributions of seven or eight of us in different regions across the country--a film that would examine the origins and implications of this extraordinary movement.

There are precedents for collaboratively-made films. Half a dozen German film-makers put together the widely-acclaimed "Germany in Autumn" in 1977, their response to the national crisis brought on by the terrorist acts of the Baader-Meinhof gang. Denis Arcand's outstanding documentary "Comfort and Indifference" was a tapestry of material shot by a number of Quebec film-makers during the referendum of 1980. So was Stephen Drolet's "Referendum, Take II" about the referendum of 1995, and so was Magnus Isacsson's "View from the Summit", about the Quebec summit of 2000.

All those films were constructed around single events that took place in times and places of limited dimensions. What we propose is a film of coast-to-coast dimensions, over a time period long enough for Canadians to get a good look at the consequences for Canada and the world of Washington's new policy of "maintaining global US pre-eminence and shaping international security in line with American principles and interests". This is the declared objective of the Project for the American New Century, a lobby group founded in 1997 by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Perle, who are now all members of the Bush administration..

Since the founding of the UN in San Francisco, with its Declaration of Human Rights drafted by Montrealer John Humphrey, and especially since the establishment by Lester Pearson of the UN's first peace-keeping force in 1956, Canada's sense of identity on the world stage has been based on our use of international institutions to resolve disputes and to mediate between the US and the rest of the world.

The Project for a New American Century makes this appear impossible. The pre-emptive strike on Iraq was part of a blueprint for the Bush administration proposed by the Project for a New American Century in September, 2000, and which read as follows:

"Peace-keeping missions demand American political leadership rather than that of the UN....Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Libya are dangerous regimes whose existence justifies the creation of a world-wide command-and-control system....It is (also) time to increase the presence of American forces in South-East Asia, providing the spur to the process of democratization of China...Combat likely will take place in new dimensions, in space, cyberspace and the world of microbes."

This blueprint led to the Bush administration's side-stepping of international conventions and bodies that were central aspects of Canadian foreign policy: the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, the International Court of Justice, the Ottawa accord banning the production and use of land-mines, the Geneva convention banning biological weapons, the Outer Space Treaty banning the use of weapons in the stratosphere, the Kyoto accord on the environment, the UN Security Council.

Some of the immediate consequences for Canada of this New American Century are now becoming clear: a diminished role for the UN; the setting up of a North American security perimeter in which Canadian police are expected to implement an integrated system of surveillance; punitive tariffs on our wheat and timber; no business for Canadian firms in the reconstruction of a country conquered by the US; humanitarian aid to the conquered country to be delivered through the occupying military force.

It looks to us as if the Project of the New American Century is a re-affirmation of the US doctrine of "manifest destiny", which took shape during the invasions of Canada in 1775 and 1812, which came to fruition with the conquest of Texas, New Mexico and California in the 1840s, which led to the occupation of the Phillipines and Cuba in 1898, and which reached a temporary halt with the war against Vietnam. We believe that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, manifest destiny has re-emerged stronger than ever, that it is now posing the most serious external challenge to our identity

as a sovereign country since the War of 1812, and that as film-makers we have an obligation to deal with it.

What we propose is a series that would open with footage that we shot during the unprecedented pre-war demonstrations that broke out in Canada and around the world on February 15, and which lasted through the war until April 22. We established some characters in those demonstrations that we would follow through this coming year as Canada is forced to deal with the economic, military and humanitarian consequences of our ambivalent attitude toward the New American Century--our opposition to its military ambitions, and yet our dependence on it economically.

These are some of the characters already established: a woman in St. John's active in the barter system of the exchange of goods and services; a Yarmouth military widow whose husband died from the effects of depleted uranium used in the first Gulf war; a popular Montreal actor who was provoked by the unilateral action of the US to speak publicly for the first time against war; an Iraqi woman lawyer in Toronto who intends to return to Baghdad to work for the establishment of a government free of US control; an accountant in Winnipeg who quit his job in January to work full time as a peace activist; the teen-age daughter of a Sikh academic in Vancouver who was motivated by the war to become active in the peace movement.

Other characters will emerge. We will be looking for a cybernet affectionado who spreads alternative news through the internet, in order to recognize the central role played by the internet in initiating and expanding the peace movement throughout the world We will also be looking for one or more characters who can speak for the minority of Canadians who supported the US--characters whose careers could be affected by economic penalties the US might impose on Canada for its non-participation in the war.

Under the direction of a coordinating team in Montreal, we are going to try to make a distinctive film-tapestry which will give a sense of the national identity that we feel is worth preserving and protecting from the New American Century. We need two months to research, develop and finalize a common script.

signed:

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